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Afghanistan: Status and Prospects of the Insurgency
Talking Points for D/NESA
22 November 1983

Three and half years after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the resistance has become an effective force that controls much of the country, [redacted] Barring a drastic change in Soviet policy, we judge the fighting will continue near current levels over the next few years. Despite improvements in weapons and training, however, we believe the insurgents will lack the firepower and organization to defeat major Soviet units. [redacted]

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As a result of increased insurgent pressure, high-ranking Soviet officials have recently expressed concern over growing losses of equipment and men.

- Large-scale Soviet and Afghan operations this spring and early summer failed to weaken the resistance, and the Afghan Government still controls about 30 percent of the country--the same amount it controlled in July 1982.
- New Soviet tactics to reduce combat losses have included less effective, higher altitude air attacks and large attack formations against even small insurgent groups, which sharply limit flexibility.
- The insurgents have expanded the war with attacks in and around major cities, especially Kabul. The Soviets are apprehensive over increasing guerrilla activity in western Afghanistan and infiltration from Iran.
- Insurgents have shown improved proficiency with antiaircraft weapons, mortars, and grenade launchers, and have improved intelligence collecting.
- The Soviets have failed so far to rebuild the Afghan Army into a force capable of effectively fighting the insurgents. [redacted]

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Soviet costs in the war have been considerable, according to our estimates based on reliable reporting.

- We estimate that over 17,000 Soviets have been killed or wounded in Afghanistan. The Afghan Army has suffered

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50,000 casualties and nearly 80,000 men have deserted.

- The insurgents have shot down or destroyed in attacks on airfields some 375 (and perhaps as many as 500) Soviet and Afghan aircraft (mostly helicopters), and nearly 150 more have been lost in accidents.
- The Soviet aircraft losses in 1983 have significantly increased over losses in 1982. We estimate replacement costs for Soviet aircraft lost in combat and accidents since the Soviet invasion at \$1.5 billion.
- Approximately 10,000 Soviet and Afghan armored vehicles and trucks have been destroyed or damaged.
- Direct Soviet costs in Afghanistan probably total around \$12 billion since the invasion. []

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[] Nevertheless, we judge the Soviets still find the costs bearable and apparently believe that their relations with many countries are recovering from the damage done by the invasion and that in the long run they will overcome the resistance. We believe there is no immediate prospect that the Soviets will decide to reduce their military effort in Afghanistan. []

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We judge that the resistance fighters will become more politically sophisticated and militarily effective in the next two years, but they will remain vulnerable.

- The most serious threat to the resistance is civilian war-weariness and the loss of popular support over the long term that would directly affect the will to continue fighting.
- Cooperation among insurgent bands has grown, but deep ideological, political, and religious differences will prevent resistance unification.
- The Soviets and the Kabul regime are likely, in our view, to continue and probably increase a wide variety of covert and overt activities--such as arranging truces, encouraging defections, and subverting groups--to exploit insurgent weaknesses inside and outside of Afghanistan.

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[] There are some Soviet options--massive reinforcement of the some 100,000 Soviet troops now in the country or a widespread scorched earth policy against civilians--that might drastically reduce the insurgency in the next two years.

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- Moscow would, however, be reluctant to assume the high economic, political, and military costs associated with these options, in our judgment. []

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[] The Soviets have started a number of economic, educational, social, and political programs in Afghanistan that they believe will eventually turn the country into a viable Soviet-dominated communist state [] Because of wide-spread insurgent activity and opposition from the Afghan people, however, these programs have been implemented in only a few areas. []

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